

we are ready to shoulder this burden even if our Republican colleagues are not going to be able to. It now looks like we will be able to do that—to have 50 Democrats vote responsibly and do what is good for the Nation, avoiding catastrophe by raising the debt ceiling to pay the debts we have already incurred, just like any household must do.

This agreement we have secured is the responsible path forward. No gamesmanship on the debt limit means no default on our sovereign debt and the calamity—the calamity—that it would cause.

Again, I thank my Republican colleagues and Leader MCCONNELL. We have had fruitful, honest, and good discussions over the last several weeks to come up with this proposal.

We are not over the finish line yet, but I want to thank all of my colleagues for working in good faith to move forward on this responsibility that must be addressed in the coming days. Soon, we will be able to cross another major item off our December to-do list. And we have more to roll up our sleeves and get working on. They are so important.

BUILD BACK BETTER ACT

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, Build Back Better: So, in the first few days of December, we have successfully avoided a government shutdown. We have cleared the path, hopefully, for addressing the debt limit; and, as I mentioned, I am optimistic that the NDAA will soon be settled.

None of these are easy accomplishments, but we are clearing the path for Democrats to turn to our biggest domestic priority of the year: passing President Biden's Build Back Better Act before Christmas.

Later today, four Senate committees will release the final texts of their portions of Build Back Better, along with CBO scores for each, as required by the reconciliation process. Those four committees are Commerce, Small Business, Banking and Housing, and Veterans' Affairs.

In the meantime, I continue to hold daily conversations with my Democratic colleagues, with the White House, with the Speaker, and House colleagues. We continue to make good progress, and we are still on track to vote on a final product before Christmas. The sooner we can pass Build Back Better, the better off American families will be as we start the new year.

This bill has always been about a simple goal: cutting costs for working and middle-class families.

People are complaining about higher costs. They are right to do that. This bill actually lowers costs in many different areas and will help families who are trying to make ends meet and stretch those dollars. Let me give you some examples.

Families are still struggling to pull themselves out of a once-in-a-century

economic crisis brought about by COVID. They want to pay less for things like healthcare, prescription drugs, childcare—some of the biggest costs average middle-income and working families have. They want us to find ways to make that happen, and that is exactly what Build Back Better does.

America, if you want lower costs, tell your Senators to vote for Build Back Better.

If we invest in American families, then we make it easier for them to work, to be productive, to flourish in society, and that makes our country stronger and lowers costs in the long term.

One of the great problems, we are told, is a shortage of workers. One of the greatest reasons for the shortage of workers is the lack of good childcare. People can't go to work if they have to look after their kids. And in this post-COVID era, a lot of the patterns that used to happen don't happen anymore.

Making childcare affordable will help bring people back to work, get our economy humming along again, and deal with some of the bottlenecks in certain areas, from certain industries, which is creating inflation.

Helping families afford childcare, of course, saves parents money, but it goes a long way to alleviating our labor shortage. If parents don't have to worry about how they will keep their kids safe during the day, they will have greater flexibility to reenter the workforce and increase the country's output. That lowers inflation.

In the long term, everyone wins—kids, parents, employers, and the entire economy. This single investment alone is enough reason to keep pushing Build Back Better, but there are so many.

One of the greatest costs we face is prescription drug costs. That is what families complain about above all. This bill goes a long way to making prescription drugs cost less.

Another great cost people are complaining about is the rising cost of housing. This bill puts more money into housing—into both rehabilitating housing that has deteriorated and putting them back into the marketplace in a real way and into creating new housing. It will reduce the dramatic increase in housing costs.

So you want to talk about inflation, you want to talk about people having to pay more, this bill is an antidote in so many areas. I have mentioned childcare, healthcare, and housing, just to name a few, but there are many others as well.

So we are going to keep working in getting this bill done. It is so important to working families and to America. To working families: less expenses, easier to make that dollar stretch when we sit down Friday night after dinner and say, "How are we going to pay the bills this week?" To America: relieving bottlenecks and making sure that our economy hums along at a rapid rate, where people are getting

good wages, but the bottlenecks caused often by COVID are reduced.

VACCINES

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, one more issue—the upcoming vaccine CRA.

On another matter, reports this morning indicate that getting vaccinated and boosted offer significant protection against the Omicron variant.

As we learn more about Omicron, it is an important moment for national leaders to double- and triple-down on encouraging all eligible Americans to get vaccinated and boosted as soon as possible.

But as soon as today, our Republican friends are going to come to the floor to push an anti-science, anti-vaccine proposal to overturn the President's vaccines requirements for businesses with more than 100 employees.

My friends, America, we are in the middle of a public health crisis. Everyone sees the damage it causes to themselves, their friends, their families, and their communities, and the way to solve this is to be driven by science.

We have had hundreds of years of scientific advancement. It has helped us live longer and live healthier. My dad just lived until 98. That didn't happen in a vacuum, and it certainly wouldn't have happened when there were scientific advances and people said, "Let's not listen to them," for political, ideological, or whatever reasons. We cannot go back to the days when people were driven by wild theories.

Some of the anti-vaxxers here in this Chamber remind me of what happened 400 years ago, when people were clinging to the fact that the Sun revolved around the Earth—they just didn't believe science—or 300 years ago or 500 years ago, when they were sure the Earth was flat. It is just like that.

The science is here. And what does the science show? The more people who get vaccinated, the greater chance we have to eliminate and, certainly, greatly reduce the virulence and "widespreadness" of this disease.

People are resisting. Is it political? Is it fueled by lies on the internet? Is it just because people fear vaccines? We never had this outcry when we had to give our kids—my kids—mumps, measles vaccines before they went to school. We never had this outcry as people lined up to get flu shots.

All of a sudden, something has happened here. It is wrong, and it is bad for the country, and it is not based on any scientific evidence whatsoever.

I know that wild stories on the internet, lies, sometimes get in people's heads, but we can't listen to people's lies. We are a fact-based society. We always have been.

The biggest thing standing between us and the end of the pandemic is Americans who have refused to get vaccinated. Too many Americans believe a wide range of conspiracy theories

about vaccines, and even those who seem to encourage those crazy theories often get vaccinated themselves and don't tell anybody. We have had so many of these hard-right leaders admitting: "Oh, yes, I did get vaccinated," even though they are telling people they shouldn't have to take one. "Oh, yes, I will get vaccinated, but you shouldn't have to."

If the only damage were to the person, him or herself, who didn't get vaccinated, maybe some people would say that is OK. But it is not just to them because, when there is a large pool of people unvaccinated, even if it is not the majority, that allows the COVID virus to spread, to mutate, to create new variants, and create new stronger variants. It is a pool of people. If you greatly reduce that pool, you greatly reduce the chance of a new variant, particularly a virulent one, from afflicting us in the months ahead. It is crazy.

The internet has had a role in spreading this, and so has the far right. The same people in the far right who want to tear down government and hurt working people in so many other ways are here doing the same thing—the same thing—even though, as I said, a good number of them get vaccinated themselves—hypocrisy.

There should be one message, and one message only, coming from this Chamber to the American people: Get vaccinated. Get boosted. Stay safe yourself. Keep your families, your communities, and our country safe.

The worst thing we can do is tie our own hands behind our backs and let these new variants spread and grow—new ones after Omicron and so many others. But that is what Republican-pushed "anti-vaccines" would do.

I will strongly vote against this amendment. I have strong feelings about what is good for this country and about fighting anti-science and theories that seem to, as I said, come from the same place that the flat Earth theory came from, that the theory that the Sun revolves around the Earth came from. Anti-science, nonsense, fictional belief come from there. We ought not give it a stamp of approval in this Chamber.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, for Washington Democrats, 2021 will have one major theme: ramming through inflationary spending on a partisan basis that hurts American families and actually helps China. That is how this all-Democratic Government began the year, jamming through a wasteful excuse for a stimulus bill that drove up

prices and made supply chain problems even worse. Not a single Republican supported it, and Democrats now want to end the year with another massive spree that would make it even worse.

The whole country understands that Democrats own this mess. They have seized one-party control of the economy. So you better believe that they will have one-party accountability for the resulting nightmare.

The President and his allies are badly upside down in overall approval ratings, upside down on the generic ballot, upside down on the economy. And the more the men and women of this country learn about the reckless taxing-and-spending spree that Democrats are planning next, the less they want it or anything close to it.

Democrats have wanted to transform the country alone. They want to print and borrow trillion after trillion on their own. They want to create even more inflation on their own. So, as the Republicans have made clear for months, they will have to own a debt ceiling increase as well. This week, the House and Senate have reached a bipartisan agreement to make that happen. As the Democratic leader said yesterday, the Democrats are "willing to carry the burden." And so they will.

We have reached an agreement on a one-time, one-shot statutory process that will enable Democrats to raise the debt limit at a fixed dollar amount, which they will specify. Much like the vote on an arms sales resolution that occurred yesterday and the Congressional Review Act vote that will occur today, this will be a standard expedited process, at a simple majority threshold, established by law. Democrats will get one shot at this. They won't be able to add any other amendments. And every single Senate Democrat will have to put their name to the gigantic dollar amount of debt they are prepared to pile on the American people.

VACCINES

Mr. McCONNELL. Now, Mr. President, on another matter, for the past 2 years, as the country has battled COVID-19, I have been a strong and consistent advocate of following the science and taking precautions. That has included strong support for the safe and effective vaccines that have helped millions of Americans substantially lower their risk of death or serious illness. I took advantage of these modern medical miracles as soon as I could. I have received a booster. I have encouraged Kentuckians and all Americans to take full advantage as well. I have recorded public service announcements.

I am a survivor of childhood polio. I have watched vaccines obliterate polio in our entire country in my lifetime. Trust me, there is no bigger proponent of vaccination than I am. But here is the thing: The United States of America is a free country. The Federal Government, elites in Washington, cannot micromanage citizens' personal choices

without a legitimate basis in law and the Constitution. And that goes double for Presidents going far beyond the bounds of their office and their authority.

President Biden's absurd private-sector vaccine mandate is blatant overreach. It is illegal. The administration has already lost in Federal court and had it blocked.

Washington Democrats have lashed themselves to a mast that is very simple: Unvaccinated people should be fired. That is what they want. They don't trust individuals, families, doctors, employers, and customers to sort things out for themselves. They want every worker at a medium-sized business and up to either get the shot or get fired by President Biden. And buried in the illegal mandate is a call to explore whether it should expand to all businesses.

This is not how things work in our country, period. Workers are not happy. Medium-sized businesses are not happy, especially not in the middle of this worker shortage. And, frankly, nobody who understands our system of government is happy.

I have heard from so many Kentuckians who are affected by the administration's suite of several unwise vaccine mandates. Here is one quote:

My wife . . . was notified that if she doesn't get fully vaccinated by January 4 then she would be terminated and lose her job without severance or unemployment. . . . She has been [there] for 17 years and has nothing but exemplary reviews.

Here is another:

I will lose my job at the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant. I very much enjoyed my work there and had every intention of retiring from the plant. However, due to Joe Biden's forced vaccine mandate, I will be terminated. . . . Please let a man who wants to work, go to work.

Here is another:

My firm [of] 103 employees will [either] lose about 25 to the mandate, or lay off 4 to get to 99. Which one should we do?

Remember, personally, I would encourage each of these Kentuckians to get the vaccine, but for the purposes of this conversation, that really isn't the point. You better believe I am going to stand up and fight for their freedom.

I want to thank the junior Senator from Indiana for spearheading this resolution to overturn the Biden administration's illegal mandate. I am a proud cosponsor. I will proudly vote for it and urge every Senator to do the same.

NOMINATION OF RACHAEL S. ROLLINS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, now on one final matter, the national murder rate just recorded its biggest jump in more than a century. In some cities, homicides have set alltime records. From Albuquerque to Milwaukee, Memphis to Des Moines, city officials reported more murders last year than in any prior year. In my hometown of Louisville, homicides this year have now broken last year's alltime record.